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McMillan or Flanagan - Interior 5634

INTERIOR DEPARTMENT ENDORSES YELLOWFIN TUNA CONSERVATION LEGISLATION

A pending Congressional bill (S. 2568) to amend the Tuna Convention Act of 1950 to include conservation regulations is based on the recommendations of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission, an investigative body established by the Tuna Convention of which the United States, Costa Rica, Panama, and Ecuador are members.

Scientific evidence collected over the past decade by the Commission's staff concerning exact measurements of commercial yellowfin tuna catches in relation to the abundance of the fishery stocks, their natural reproduction, and mortality rates indicates that unless the fishery is regulated at once the yield of yellowfin tuna from the eastern tropical Pacific may be seriously reduced.

In a letter to Senator Warren G. Magnuson, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Assistant Secretary of the Interior Frank P. Briggs stated, "We believe that our Government should cooperate fully with the Commission's recommendations. If the Commission's recommendations are carried out, our domestic fishery as well as the fishery of the other participants to the convention will benefit materially by preventing damage to the resource and the maintenance of maximum sustained yield."

The Department's Fish and Wildlife Service said that in 1950 the yellowfin tuna seemed to be an inexhaustible resource and this might have held true for many years except for recent developments in fishing techniques and gear.

In the eastern tropical Pacific Ocean, Bureau of Commercial Fisheries marine biologists explain, oceanic factors make purse seining possible, and the advent of nylon fishing nets and mechanized power blocks to handle the nets made purse seining practicable, greatly increasing efficiency. The old tuna bait boats, which took three or four months to bring home a load of fish, have been replaced or converted to purse seiners which often can bring home a payload in 30 days. the result was a total catch last year of about 120,000 tons of yellowfin tuna--an amount estimated to be more than the maximum sustainable yield. Tuna Commission biologists believe the catch dipped into the stocks last year and that such continued utilization can mean only a severe decline in the resource, affecting fishermen, boat owners, docks, canners, and consumers.

The measure now in Congress proposes a quota limiting the 1962 catch to 63,000 tons--74,600 tons during the yellowfin season and 8,400 tons incidental to the skipjack season which follows. The quota would be set annually by the Tuna commission, and provision also is made for import restrictions on all yellowfin tuna except from countries with regulations meeting the conservation requirements.

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